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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [UNHRC](#)
SUBJECT: NORWAY COMMITTED TO DURBAN II ENGAGEMENT
REF: STATE 14204

Classified By: Political Counselor Kristen Bauer for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Despite discussion of the issue in the Norwegian press, the GON refuses to disclose its "red lines"--what would be completely unacceptable for Norway--in the context of the Durban II conference in Geneva. While Norway can be counted on to support freedom of expression, its preference is to engage until the last moment in an effort to influence the outcome. End Summary.

12. (C) Anne Merchant, Senior Advisor in the MFA Section for Human Rights and Democracy, told poloff that beyond stating that Norway would not agree to a protection of religion per se and "would protect freedom of expression," she could not tell us where Norway's red lines stand, because "it's too early to judge the preparatory process." Furthermore "there is nuance in the issues about which the OIC is concerned--it's not as black and white as the media has represented it to be." However, "if we have a result that's unacceptable, we're not there to sell our soul." Merchant said Norway's goal is to be a "constructive negotiating partner," and emphasized to poloff (repeatedly) how much Norway believes that engagement is the best policy.

13. (C) Merchant gave poloff the following policy statement: "Norway hopes that the review conference will give new momentum to the important work of the UN against racism and discrimination. We have participated very actively in the ongoing preparatory work in Geneva. Norway firmly believes that the conference should focus on reviewing progress and assessing the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Program of Action. Norway believes the conference should not involve re-opening the texts adopted in 2001. These texts provide a comprehensive framework to address all forms of racism and discrimination. We believe active participation is important in order to influence the outcome. We must not repeat the errors of Durban I."

14. (SBU) There has been discussion in the Norwegian press over the last few days about whether Norway's stance with regard to Durban II should be clarified, with the president of Parliament, Thorbjorn Jagland saying that Norway should either boycott the conference or pull out in protest if the OIC proposal is adopted. Voices in the right-wing Progress Party have also said that Norway should publicly state where its red lines lie beforehand. Poloff discussed these trends with Merchant, who stood her ground.

15. (C) Comment: Our impression is that the Norwegian negotiators may have red lines they will not cross, but the government is unwilling to disclose them, and in this way hopes to maximize its appearance of neutrality. This is a common Norwegian negotiating trait, which to us at times seems to confuse inoffensiveness and influence, and holds "engagement" as a goal in itself. Naturally, Norway's candidacy for a seat on the Human Rights Council figures into its calculus. End comment.
JOHNSON